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## SCHOOL EXCURSIONS

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Most teachers have had occasion to lament the fact that on school excursions some of the children see and hear but little and that most of them miss some important facts. Teachers have tried to overcome these difficulties by waiting for the laggards, by placing the shorter children in front, or by dividing the class into groups which are shown successively the objects under consideration. Then, of course, those who are waiting grow restless and perhaps disorderly.

The writer has been experimenting for a year with a plan which seems to eliminate these difficulties. It may be worth while to give the details of this plan for the sake of those who feel the need of a change in excursion procedure. This is done with a full realization that others may have employed the same or similar plans.

On an afternoon about a week before each excursion the teacher and four children went on a preliminary trip. This number was found convenient for the group of twenty-eight sixth-grade children with which the plan was tried. These four were to be the "lecturers" on the day of the excursion.

A number of factors determined the method of procedure on these preliminary trips—the character of the place visited, the character of the children, the nature of the topic to be studied, and the children's previous knowledge of this topic.

Late in the year, on the occasion of the preliminary trip to the rooms of the New York Historical Society, the four "lecturers" were "turned loose" to investigate the contents of the two rooms, read explanatory cards for themselves, and report their selections to the teacher, who wandered about within easy reach to give what help she could when appealed to. Now and then a child sought her to ask the meaning of a phrase, or to say "Do you see how

that works? I don't," or just in pure joy to share a particularly delightful "find." For the most part, the teacher inspected the exhibits in a leisurely way and greatly enjoyed the business-like attack which the children made.

Perhaps it was well that she was on hand to help adjust conflicting claims to the Lafayette punch bowl, the Beekman coach, and such "plums," although it seems probable that that particular group of "lecturers" would have worked out the division of the spoils fairly and amicably.

The children took notes as they went around a second time, studying more carefully the exhibits chosen. In some cases they went to the public library and read quite extensively during the next day or two and before the day of the excursion submitted their carefully prepared notes for criticism and suggestion.

Our first experience was at the Natural History Museum, such a large place that it was impossible to let the children browse and select at will. The teacher had previously picked out certain cases to which she took the group, stopping at each case and calling the children's attention to interesting features, reading the explanatory cards, and answering questions. Then the children were allowed to choose the cases they wished to "lecture" about. Conflicts were adjusted with but little difficulty.

On the morning of each excursion, the teacher placed on the blackboard four columns of names. The child whose name headed a column was to be the "leader" of that group, responsible for the children being in the right place at the right time and behaving properly. Each leader made two copies of the names of the children in his group, one for himself and one for the teacher. The teacher also had a chart showing the order in which the groups were to go to the different lecturers, and she made it a point to see that the changes took place smoothly.

Lecturers					Groups
Susan	.	.	.	.	1, 2, 3, 4
Walter	.	.	.	.	2, 1, 4, 3
Henry	.	.	.	.	3, 4, 1, 2
Kate	.	.	.	.	4, 3, 2, 1

The leaders' duties began when the class arrived at its destination. The groups were separated, the "lecturers" took their

places, and each leader was told to which "lecturer" he was to take his group. A rendezvous was designated and the leaders instructed to take their groups there after the first lecture. The teacher circulated among the groups more or less but managed to be at the meeting place about the time the first of the four groups returned.

There were inevitably some waits, but the time was not wasted. The children discussed what they had seen and heard, or looked independently at objects near at hand. When the excursion was made to the Dyckman Farm House, the front porch was the rendezvous. Three groups were waiting. Said the teacher, "Mix up and play, if you want to," and off on the grass they ran. The fourth group arrived, the whistle blew, and in an unbelievably short time the four groups stood waiting for another "lecture."

As to discipline, on no occasion has the teacher had to interfere; indeed, the groups have all been so earnest that there has been practically no trouble. Once a "lecturer" was overheard saying, "Now, please Jack, look at the *right things*. Somebody else is going to explain all that and you won't get either kind if you don't look at the right things and listen *at the time*." Whereat Jack speedily fell into line.

On another occasion a child broke away from a group and started toward the teacher, calling her name. The "lecturer" pursued her. She spoke firmly, but with no excitement. "Here, you have no business to ask Miss ——. I'm in charge and I'm just going to tell you."

Again the teacher heard a leader say to one of the children, "If you *have* seen it before, don't be talking; listen to what he's saying."

The offender replied, "I did listen."

Thoughtlessly, the teacher asked, "What is the trouble?"

The leader replied with dignity, "Oh, nothing," and the teacher retired to the background where she belonged.

There may have been other slight disturbances, but no others were observed. Indeed, in the main, there has been a delightful spirit of courtesy and respect for the rights of others.

One pleasing instance of such respect occurred at the Dyckman House. The teacher wandered up to a group which was standing

in front of a case of Revolutionary relics. The "lecturer" welcomed her approach. "When we were here the other day, the custodian showed us another gun like this in the winter kitchen and explained how it worked. I *think* James is going to lecture about it. If he isn't, I'd like to lecture about this one. Of course I don't want to interfere with his lecture. Could you. . . ."

Realizing that he was asking the teacher to act as messenger, he stopped, embarrassed. In the most matter of fact tone she replied, "Surely, I will go and find out." James was going to explain the gun and William smilingly gave up doing so.

When the prepared program had been completed, the children were told that they might have a few minutes to wander about alone or in groups of their own choosing, only they were not to go so far that the leaders would have difficulty in reassembling them when the time was up. This free time was highly appreciated. Off they would go, by twos for the most part, some to re-examine what they had been shown, the majority to browse independently; and who can say that this may not have been the most valuable part of the excursion?

Just before they were given this free time at the New York Historical Society, the children were told that later they would be expected to write a paper about whatever had interested them most, now was their time to give further study to anything they had seen, or to look about for something which might interest them more.

The papers were illuminating. Seven of the twenty-eight wrote of things not included in the day's program; six wrote of an object which it would not have occurred to the teacher to stress, and only one discussed the model of Fulton's steamboat, which she had supposed would be a favorite.

It has been gratifying to have some outsiders, who have observed the plan in operation, comment upon it favorably. The custodian of one of the historical buildings visited is ordinarily annoyed by the presence of children. On this occasion he watched the proceedings with interest and said, "I have seen hundreds of classes come here, and this is the best I ever saw." It may not seem modest to report this, but he said it three times, once to the teacher

when she was alone, once to a visiting lady, and once to the children, when he bade them goodbye, after having shown them a room usually kept locked. To the teacher he added, "Most times most of the children can't see. They don't learn anything. These children are learning."

At the New York Historical Society a woman was copying a portrait of Peter Stuyvesant. She was considerably annoyed when the first group of children assembled near her and the "lecturer" began to talk about the doughty Peter. The teacher stood near, apparently studying another picture, in reality alert to see what would happen. The artist stopped painting and listened to the dignified little girl. She grew interested, and when the lecture was at an end told the children other facts about the old governor. When the group passed quietly on she questioned the teacher who explained the plan. The artist was delighted. "That's the way to do it, thoughtfully, with brains. Most of the classes that come here don't get anywhere."

And what do the children themselves think of this way of managing an excursion? Unanimously they approve. "You can see and hear better in small groups." "You have more chance to ask questions." "It's easier for the teacher." "You like to do things for yourself." "It makes you feel more grown up." Some ingenuously announced, "It's most fun when you are lecturer." That it was of most profit to the "lecturers" was quite evident. How some of those youngsters worked to prepare for their lectures!

Not long after the excursion to the New York Historical Society, the children were told to write a paper which should be a surprise to the teacher, a story, a description, a poem, whatever they liked on the topic in history which had interested them most so far. Three of the four lecturers on that last trip chose something that they had lectured about, and one other child wrote of something shown him on that occasion. One of these surprise papers, as we called them, states the matter very naively. "The thing I enjoyed most in the year was the lecture I gave, and the thing I enjoyed lecturing about most was Fulton's steamboat so I have written a poem about it."

It is possible to arrange so that during the year each child shall have this vital experience of "lecturing" during an excursion. Some "lecturers" are uninspiring; they haven't the gift. A very few are indifferent and feel little sense of responsibility. But the majority take the matter seriously. Two little "lecturers" arranged to take to the museum three children who were absent on the day of the excursion.

Of course, not all excursions can be conducted in this way. Occasionally the group must keep together; time may be limited; or it may not be safe for the children to wander about alone, in a factory, for instance; or it may be that the explanations must be given by experts who cannot be asked to give them more than once, as at the weather bureau.

Again, there may be classes which would not respond favorably to the method. As far as the writer's experience goes, the plan has been tried with only one class and that an unusually responsive and responsible group of children. It may not work so well another year. There seems no doubt, however, that many groups would get more from an excursion so conducted than from an excursion *en masse*.